

**AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS:**

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application. Please cancel claims 3-5 without prejudice, amend claims 1 and 2 and add new claims 6-9 as follows:

**LISTING OF CLAIMS:**

1. (Currently Amended) A method for excluding ~~[[the]]~~ entry of debris to ~~[[the]]~~ an outer surface of ~~[[the]]~~ an outer seal ~~[[17]]~~ of ~~[[the]]~~ a sealing system of a propeller shaft ~~[[18]]~~ passing through ~~[[the]]~~ a hull of a maritime vessel to ~~[[the]]~~ an exterior side thereof, ~~in which method~~ comprising the steps of:

introducing flushing water ~~is introduced~~ to ~~[[the]]~~ an immediate vicinity of the outer seal from an internal water source of the vessel,

wherein ~~[[the]]~~ a flushing flow thus established is from ~~[[a]]~~ an annular member ~~[[1]]~~ surrounding the propeller shaft ~~[[18]]~~ and the outer seal, the flushing flow ~~[[17]]~~ is directed toward the propeller shaft and is uniformly distributed about ~~[[the]]~~ a periphery of the propeller shaft, and ~~[[which]]~~ the flushing flow is established escaping via at least one opening ~~[[22]]~~ of the annular member and exiting into ~~[[the]]~~ a space between ~~[[the]]~~ a propeller and the hull of the vessel so as to prevent debris carried by ~~[[the]]~~ outside water from reaching the outer surface of the outer seal of the propeller shaft.

2. (Currently Amended) A device of excluding [[the]] entry of debris to [[the]] an outer surface of [[the]] an outer seal [[[17]]] of [[the]] a sealing system of a propeller shaft passing through [[the]] a hull of a maritime vessel to [[the]] an exterior side thereof, wherein said device ~~comprises a~~ comprising:

an annular member [[[1]]] surrounding the propeller shaft [[[18]]] and the outer seal [[[17]]], said annular member including an internal flow distribution duct [[[25]]] and at least one opening [[[22]]] exiting from said distribution duct toward [[the]] a periphery of said propeller shaft for establishing a water flow escaping via [[the]] said at least one opening and exiting into [[the]] a space between [[the]] a propeller and the hull of the vessel so as to prevent debris carried by [[the]] outside water from reaching the outer seal of the propeller shaft,

means for distributing [[the]] said water flow substantially uniformly around the propeller shaft, ~~as well as~~ and

means ~~(2, 4, 5)~~ for feeding flushing water into said internal flow distribution duct from an internal water source of the vessel.

3. (Canceled)

4. (Canceled)

5. (Canceled)

6. (New) The method of claim 1, wherein the propeller shaft is lubricated by oil.

7. (New) The device of claim 2, wherein the propeller shaft is lubricated by oil.

8. (New) The method of claim 1, wherein the annular member surrounds the outer surface of the outer seal.

9. (New) The device of claim 2, wherein the annular member surrounds the outer surface of the outer seal.